

their herds to the needs of the reduced market. Contrariwise, if our protective barriers were broken down, so that foreigners could pay for goods with goods, the automobile market would be widened, and Detroit would have to intensify its specialization and, consequently, call for more workers. An industry can be just as effectively destroyed by a tax as by a bomb, and a city can be more permanently reduced by political interference with production and exchange than by a squadron of B-29s.

During the war many of us who had no knowledge of or inclination for the business were forced into agriculture by our inability to get stuff from farmers. The "victory garden" was a sideline, to be sure, but it was a sideline made necessary by the blocking of the market; regardless of the invigorating exercise of weeding, we bookkeepers and steamfitters might have preferred to spend our evenings otherwise if the availability, and the price, of cabbages were otherwise. In rural communities food shortages are not as pronounced as in the towns simply because the difficulties of exchange—haulage, rationing and price controls turned folks toward barter. As much as possible the neighbors dispose of their products among themselves to avoid the nuisance of bureaucratic interference, and the growing inclination toward wages "in kind" is traceable to the difficulties of exchange, to say nothing of the income tax. When the law makes it hard to do business you try to get around the law, and in so doing you cut down the volume of business.

The current philosophy of government is all for political control of the marketplace. One of the postulates of that philosophy is that the marketplace is an inherently imperfect mechanism, that it must be regulated, controlled, directed. Men must not be allowed free exercise of their judgment in making exchanges, their sense of value must not be trusted, the fickleness of their desires must be curbed for their own good. Regardless of whether or not the marketplace can be planned, or what political force must be employed to try it, the result will inevitably be a curtailment of production. The difficulties imposed will drive people toward some simpler, even if more laborious and less satisfying, way of getting on through life. That is decentralization. It will not be the voluntary choosing of a more pleasant existence, regardless of the economics of it, but a retrogression forced on us by political meddling.

* Apparently the Potsdam conferees decided to try out Baruch's decentralizing plan. For the German people who, unlike their conquerors, will thus be rid of militarism, it would be a boon if the plan were to prosper. But, 80,000,000 people in a limited area cannot be permanently reduced to an agricultural economy; the natural process of specialization and exchange will break through the artificial barriers, new capital (even if owned by foreigners) will appear and manufacturing will again flourish. The Baruch plan serves only as a sop to popular passion.

Real Reconversion.—Let us alone.

FINE ART OF PLUNDER
SEVERAL readers have found fault with *analysis* for the emphasis it puts on economics. This criticism reminds me of a comment made by the former Secretary of Labor who, by the way, is a lady possessed of more wisdom than she has generally been given credit for. We were talking about freedom and I happened to mention the bread-and-butter side of it. "But," she said, "isn't freedom a matter of the spirit?" In the limited time at hand this philosophic observation could not be carried to a conclusion, and for quick answer I had to content myself with another question: "How long can a hungry spirit feel free?"

When you go to the bottom of it, freedom is indeed an emotional experience, a sense of personal dignity, and this is not measurable in dollars or things. The slave who glories in his servility because he lacks none of the comforts of life is all the more a slave; the flunkey who is proud to be the man of an open-handed gentleman is a well-conditioned flunkey; the contractor who pays for his opulence in deference to a crooked politician is no freer in spirit than the well-kept woman of a despised paramour. The spirit of freedom is measured only in the coin of self-respect, and that is not the subject-matter of economics.

The environmentalist makes the point that this sense of dignity is innate with all of us, that it asserts itself or is crushed by the conditions under which we live. There is something to be said for and against this thesis. While it is true that the proverbial mess of pottage will buy many a soul, we cannot explain a Tom Paine in that way, nor even the obscure clerk who will quit a well-paying job to get away from a domineering employer, nor less the conscientious objector who finds freedom in jail. Economic conditioning does not conclusively prove its case.

Why men in various degrees resent restraint upon their desire for self-expression, why some men do and some men don't seek freedom, must remain in the field of speculation. But, how and why restraint is put upon men by men is no mystery at all. As a social, not a personal, question, freedom is decidedly not a matter of the spirit; it is a matter of the relationships that grow up among gregarious men, and these relationships are objective facts, readily explainable.

When we consider the motive of men in seeking to prevent other men from giving full expression to their faculties, or from enjoying the fruits thereof, we find ourselves enmeshed in economics. There are two ways of making one's way through life; one is production, the other is robbery. Production involves labor, which induces a feeling of weariness. Men therefore tend to seek satisfactions with the minimum expenditure of effort. That's why they build labor-saving devices. That's why, also, they incline toward getting something for nothing. But the getting of something for nothing, putting aside charity, implies the taking of another's production; his freedom to enjoy the fruits of his efforts is infringed.

Since the individual experiences an attachment for that which he has put his labor into, has a sense of ownership in it, force must be employed to deprive him of its enjoyment. Why the producer should resent being forcibly separated from his product is explicable only by recourse to the concept of "rights"; the necessity of existence arouses a keen interest in the things which make life possible, and he invokes the right of property to support his claim to life.

To get around this impasse sagacious man resorts to persuasion; the victim must become a willing partner to his robbery. He must be convinced that it is for his own benefit that he is being taxed, that he profits by the privilege of paying a tariff, that the advantages enjoyed by certain citizens do not in fact deprive him of his property but rather inure to his welfare, that he must give up in order to prosper. The invention of these subtle means of extraction and their rationalization is the business of politics; that is why it has been called the fine art of plunder.

Hence, when we treat of freedom as a social question we cannot dissociate politics from economics, we cannot divorce means from ends. To rail against political interferences with our liberties without pointing up its purpose is quixotic. Every infraction of freedom has an economic interpretation, and it is this interpretation with which *analysis* concerns itself.

free trade as either urgent or popular. The principle of equal freedom in the economic realm remains, nevertheless, the probable price of peace. Interference in the struggle for existence as it functions in the production and exchange of the necessities of mankind is a potent cause of conflict and disaster. That the importance of this subject cannot be exaggerated was understood by Emerson, who wrote, in the early pages of his *Journal*:

"Trade was always in the world, and, indeed, to judge hastily, we might well deem trade to have been the purpose for which the world was created. It is the cause, the support and the object of all government. Without it, men would roam the wilderness alone, and never meet in the kind conventions of social life."

"Who is he that causes this busy stir, this mighty and laborious accommodation of the world to men's wants? Who is he that plants care like a canker at men's hearts, and furrows their brows with thrifty calculations? that makes money for his instrument, and therewith sets men's passions in ferment and their faculties in action, unites them together in the clamorous streets and arrays them against each other in war? It is Trade—Trade, which is the mover of the nations and the pillar whereon the fortunes of life hang."

"All else is subordinate. Tear down, if you will, the temples of Religion, the museums of Art, the laboratories of Science, the libraries of Learning—and the regret excited among mankind would be cold, alas! and faint;—a few would be found, a few enthusiasts in secret places to mourn over their ruins;—but destroy the temples of Trade, your stores, your wharves and your floating castles on the deep; restore to the earth the silver and gold which was dug out thence to serve his purpose;—and you shall hear an outcry from the ends of the earth. Society would stand still, and men return howling to the forests and caves, which would now be the grave, as they were once the cradle, of the human race."

The plight of the civilian populations of the war-swept areas of the world, where the normal currents of trade have been arrested, staggers the imagination. The distress of racked and ruined survivors, after years of indescribable misery and loss amidst the hell of war, warns us not to regard Emerson's words as a mere rhetorical flourish. Still lower depths may be reached if we continue to trust to violence instead of economic justice in the attempt to reconstitute world relationships.

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